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## THE COLUMBIA PARK BOYS' CLUB, A UNIQUE PLAYGROUND

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Many persons in the country to-day are coming to realize that a boy's play, far from being a negligible quantity, is well nigh as important a factor in his life as his schooling. In school a boy learns the facts that fit him to take his place in the world, but it is largely in his relations with his playfellows that his character is formed. "A boy is known by the company he keeps," and is largely formed by it. It was with this idea in mind that Sidney S. Peixotto started his boys' club work in San Francisco fifteen years ago, the fruition of which is the Columbia Park Boys' Club, which is to-day perhaps the most unique and highly developed institution of its kind in the United States.

Instead of going at the problem of the city boy and his spare hours with the idea of what is "good for the boy" and what "he ought to do," the question in the Columbia Park Boys' Club has been first, what does the city boy want? What appeals to him? In other words the club aims to give healthful play of the kind boys really like, not the kind that people think they ought to like, but this play is so molded that its results are a vital character-building force in a boy's life.

That the club appeals to boys is shown by the fact that while many boys' clubs are seeking members, this club has its membership limited to the number that the workers can properly handle. There is also a large waiting list, taken care of by putting those wishing to join in a recruit gymnasium class to wait until there is a vacancy in the club.

Other than this limitation of numbers, there is no restriction as to admission to the club. Boys of any nationality or creed are at liberty to join, although they are not admitted, except in unusual cases, over the age of fourteen or under the age of eight.

No dues are charged by the club. The boys are expected to look upon it as they do their school; to repay what it gives them

in the same way that they are expected to repay the state for what it gives them in the way of education, by loyalty and good citizenship, or, translated in the terms of the club, to have the right club spirit and to be a "good club member," with all that that is taken to mean, including living up to a high standard of behavior.

A "good club member" must attend club regularly three times a week, once for his club night, once for gymnasium, and once for military drill or band practice. The latter two terms must be self-explanatory here, although much could be said about the work of the club along both of these lines. It has reached a high state of perfection. The words "club night" hardly convey an adequate idea to the uninitiated. The boys of the club are divided into groups of twenty-five each and thus formed into clubs, each meeting one night a week and having its own officers. These organizations last only for a year, when the members are redistributed. This saves cliques. The clubs carry on a tournament in all varieties of sport: baseball, basket-ball, track athletics, gymnasium competition and so on. The boys come to gymnasium in the same group as to their club night; that is, for example, the group that comes Tuesday to club comes Wednesday to gymnasium. On the club night proper, three activities are carried on. First comes the parliamentary meeting, then an hour's manual training work and then an impromptu act, the plot of which is made up beforehand but the dialogue of which develops as the play progresses.

These are the three main divisions of the club—club-night, gymnasium and drill—but in addition to these, two bands, a drum corps and a chorus are maintained. Considerable attention is devoted to athletics, the outgrowth of the club's athletic work being the Public Schools Athletic League of San Francisco, through which it has been the prime factor in introducing sanely regulated athletics into the schools of the city. This organization has its headquarters at the club and the bulk of the actual work is done by persons also connected with the club.

It may be said here in passing that the club has developed more and more into a school-boy's club, an adjunct to the public school. The effort has been constantly made to keep boys at school as long as possible and encourage them to do good work in school. The whole plan of the club is such that a school boy

finds it easy to be a regular member, while a boy that goes to work, misses many of its advantages.

The above is a brief resumé of the Columbia Park Boys' Club during the major part of the year in its San Francisco home, but one of the most important phases of the work is crowded into the seven weeks' summer vacation, when camps are in order. The summer walking trips of the club have become famous as a unique development of this institution. These trips were started some years ago by Major Peixotto without any particular thought as to what they would develop into. Mr. Peixotto was a great lover of tramping himself and every summer used to take a walking trip into the Sierra Nevada mountains in the region of Yosemite Valley. One year he invited two of the club boys to accompany him. The experiment pleased him so well that the next year he took five of them on a short walk from San Francisco to Monterey, about one hundred and twenty miles. The next year he increased the number to twelve and the walk was to Yosemite Valley.

During this year the chorus of the club had been developed to a high state of perfection and most of the best singers happened to be on this trip. When they were in Yosemite Valley it was suggested that the boys give a concert in the chapel, which was accordingly done. This gave Mr. Peixotto the idea that if he could work up this feature of giving a concert or other performance properly, he would be able to make some money, which would pay the expenses of such a trip and would enable him to take away a larger number of boys. Accordingly, when the next summer came, eighteen boys were included in the party and a regular vaudeville entertainment was planned. The objective point of the tour was Eureka, some four hundred miles north of San Francisco, and, in the lumber camps of Mendocino County and the towns along the route, the boys made a big success of the attempt. The next year the trip was to Los Angeles, five hundred miles to the south, and since that time the tour has alternated between these two points with a constantly increasing number of boys reaching fifty-five in 1908.

During the past year, Mr. Peixotto, encouraged by his success at home, took a group of forty boys, which had been on trips before, on an extended tour of Australia, which lasted from May, 1909, to February, 1910. It would be impossible to do more than to

mention here this remarkable undertaking, which he has carried through with great success. In the meantime, however, another group of boys was taken on the regular walking trip to Los Angeles and along every line of endeavor made fully as much of a success of it as those in former years, showing that such a trip is entirely feasible to any group of boys properly conducted.

These summer walking trips are great builders of bone and tissue. After a boy has walked five or six hundred miles, slept in the open air and eaten plain, wholesome and abundant food for seven weeks, he is in the pink of physical condition. It is a treat to see the lads of one of these parties when they return to the city after their vacation. Ruddy and tanned, with legs as hard as iron, they come back, glowing with memories of happy days and ready physically and mentally for a year of earnest work in school.

The trips are hard in some ways. On account of the theatrical performances, the tour must be made according to a schedule laid out beforehand, and the party must never be behind time. They must make the town they are due to show in, be the distance four or twenty-eight miles, the walks varied between these two extremes last summer, the average being from fifteen to twenty miles a day, and then they must parade on the main street, each boy of the party playing some musical instrument, then give a high-class entertainment that has to be kept up to the scratch, then to bed in the sleeping bags and up early the next morning to avoid the heat on the day's walk. Of course, the trip is planned so that occasional rests of a day or so are taken in the larger towns.

On the march, the boys are allowed to take their natural pace, only being required to keep between a leading and a trailing party, which are often two miles apart. The paraphernalia of the party, including sleeping bags, no tents are used, summer in California being rainless, a complete set of costumes for the performance, band instruments and cooking equipment is carried on two wagons. To get this all in such a small compass requires some scientific packing, but it can be done with a little planning. Food is bought as needed in the towns along the route. The boys do all their own cooking and other camp work.

The educational value of these trips can hardly be overestimated. For example, on the last summer walking trip to Los Angeles and San Diego, the boys covered 1,500 miles, 440 on foot

and the rest by railroad. They saw every city and town of importance in Southern California, visited nearly every one of California's historic missions and got an idea of the character and products of the country they passed through, such as cannot be acquired from car windows, and one that will make an impression that years of study would hardly give.

Besides the walking party, the club has maintained each year, for the past eight years, a stationary camp. This is a junior republic with a government worked out largely along original lines, to suit the needs of the camp, rather than in imitation of any form of actual government. At this camp, as on the walking trips, the boys do all the camp work and, this done, swim to their heart's content, play baseball and other games, and get up entertainments to give around the camp fire in the evening.

This summer work has become an extremely important factor in the club. The boys look forward to it with the greatest anticipation. They talk about last summer's camp until Christmas and then they begin to talk about the next year. With the three trips of the past year, one of forty-three to Australia, one of forty-four to Los Angeles and one of sixty to the stationary camp at Cloverdale, nearly every member that has been in club any length of time was taken away during the summer. Six weeks, day and night, with a boy, means knowing him as you can never know him in six years of ordinary club work, and it has been a tremendous factor in the success of the club as an organization for boys.